

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Later today, the House of Representatives will take up H.R. 1, the Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act of 2003. The bill is expected to pass narrowly and largely along party lines. Representative Xavier Becerra (CA - 31), the only Southern California member of the powerful House Committee on Ways and Means that oversees our nation's Medicare laws, will vote against the bill.

"May our seniors forgive this House for what we are about to do," Rep. Becerra said. "Our nation's greatest generation deserves a Medicare prescription drug program that is universal, equitable, accessible and cost effective. To say that this bill comes anywhere close to being described in such a way is laughable. This Republican bill is just the latest step in their long-march toward privatizing Medicare."

The 10-year, nearly \$400 billion Medicare overhaul plan under consideration by the House today was approved by both the Ways and Means and the Energy and Commerce Committees last week on party line votes. Under the bill, seniors would be forced to purchase plans covering both healthcare and prescription drugs offered by private insurance companies who are reimbursed by the federal government. But rather than regulate the costs of these programs, the Republican plan only makes suggestions about the costs of an insurance provider's premiums and deductibles. Thus, seniors would be at the whim of private insurers who may or may not provide affordable coverage, particularly in less profitable markets - such as rural and low-income urban areas.

"Though Democrats did put together an alternative prescription drug benefit program, politics won out over principle, and I expect this far superior proposal will get voted down on a party line vote," Rep Becerra said.

The House Democratic bill guarantees a monthly premium of only \$25, and a low deductible of \$100. "Whereas the Republican plan ensures more hassle, the Democratic bill ensures better healthcare - and does it at a lower cost to seniors," Rep. Becerra said. "In contrast, the Republican prescription drug plan costs seniors more money and comes with zero guarantees."